

Primary 2 & 4 pupils to take SEA on July 19

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For the first time in Ghana's history, all Primary 2 and 4 pupils throughout the country's public primary schools will be writing the same papers in tests in schools. This momentous event, which takes place on Wednesday, July 19, 2006, is a significant development for which the Ghana Education Service (GES) and for that matter the government should be given credit.

BECAS

In the Wednesday, August 31, 2005 edition of the Daily Graphic (page 11), this author reported an initiative the GES began in 2003 to improve the implemented and attained curricula in mathematics and English in our basic schools. This initiative is referred to as the Ghana Basic Education Comprehensive Assessment System (BECAS). The BECAS is a new assessment system to replace the national tests, namely, Criterion Referenced Tests (CRT) and Performance Monitoring Tests (PMT) instituted in the 1990s to monitor pupils' achievement and progress in English and Mathematics.

The BECAS was instituted to address the Ministry's Education Strategic Plan objective QE6, which states "to develop a reliable pupil/student/learner testing and assessment system". It will provide quality information to the Ministry of Education and Sports, Donor Groups and Communities, the Ghana Education Service, teachers and parents, to improve instruction.

BECAS is made up of three assessment components: National Education Assessment (NEA); School Education Assessment (SEA) and Continuous Assessment (CA) (see Wednesday, August 31, 2005 edition of the Daily Graphic, page 11). The three components or tests of the system are linked and managed by one unit, – the Assessment Service Unit (ASU) – in the Curriculum Research and Development Division of the GES.

School Education Assessment: 2006

The SEA test is a minimum-competency-based test that reflects the essential elements of the curriculum considered basic to the class level performance expected for pupils' continuation. SEA is to be given at Primary 2, Primary 4, and Primary 6. However, due to financial constraints, no provision was made for Primary 6 pupils in the 2006 SEA.

On Wednesday, July 19, 2006, SEA tests will be administered to Primary 2 and 4 pupils by their headteachers under the supervision of officers from the GES District Directorates of Education. Two tests, Mathematics and English, will be administered in each class on the same day. That is, the headteacher and his/her assistant are expected to work together in each school administering the tests simultaneously.

The tests, which cover all content domains in the two subjects, contain both *multiple-choice* and *constructed-response items*. In the latter, students are given no options but are expected to write down their own answers. The Primary 2 tests comprise of 15 multiple-choice items and 5 constructed-response items; and the Primary 4 comprise of 30 multiple-choice items and 10 constructed-response items. The pupils will be expected to use *separate answer sheets for shading their answers* to the multiple choice items. The multiple-choice and constructed-response items will be scored 60% and 40% respectively.

Purpose of the tests

The tests are designed to serve a diagnostic purpose in the sense that the results will show the areas of the curriculum in which the pupils' strengths and weaknesses lie. The teacher can then take the necessary remedial measures to improve the situation during the process of instruction. It is also expected that schools will use the results to make conscious effort to improve the implemented curricula in order to increase attainment in the subjects and the whole school system.

The test is **not** meant to compare performance of pupils across schools or districts (i.e. generate schools performance league tables). Also, it is anticipated that besides its diagnostic purposes, subsequent SEA tests will provide schools with information on how well they are improving year after year.

Development of tests

The BECAS tests were developed by a group of experienced educators made up of the following: staff working for AED (an American NGO); ASU/CRDD staff and other senior officers from GES; a Technical Working Group made up of subject officers and representatives from WAEC and the subject associations - MAG and GATE; UCC and UEW experts in educational measurement and evaluation and mathematics education; and foreign consultants in psychometrics, continuous assessment and item bank development. The items were trial tested with the help of Circuit Supervisors in selected districts in 2004.

Item bank

The items piloted were analyzed and further revised where necessary. Several parallel items have since been developed and housed in an item bank. The item bank has been uploaded onto the internet and it is anticipated that educators in the districts will be able to draw items to assemble new tests in subsequent years. As new items are written, they will be stored in the item bank by the ASU.

Scoring and reporting tests results

Circuit Supervisors from the district offices will prepare and monitor headteachers in the administration of the tests and take delivery of test materials at Circuit Centres within 24 hours after the administration of the tests. The Circuit Supervisors will mark (or oversee the marking) of all the tests in their circuits and return the marked multiple-choice answer sheets and constructed response items to schools for analyses of strengths and weaknesses. Headteachers are to return summaries of pupils' responses on each of the

options provided for the multiple-choice items to the Circuit Supervisors. They are also expected to write a brief summary of the results and discuss them with the Circuit Supervisor for the sake of remedial action and improved instruction. The Circuit Supervisors will compile summary the schools' results and write reports on the overall performance of their circuits on the tests. District summaries of the results will be compiled and sent to the Regional office and the ASU for further analyses.

Responsibilities of parents, schools and districts

Parents whose wards are in Primary 2 and 4 in the nation's public schools should ensure the children are punctual in school and are well fed on Wednesday, July 19, 2006; the pupils should also be provided with pencils, erasers and other writing tools.

Since the test involves the use separate answer sheets for the multiple-choice items, pupils will require some practice before the test. Teachers should ensure the pupils are well prepared in shading answer cards before the tests.

District Directorates of Education should ensure schools have the required number of test materials by doing photocopies where there are shortfalls. They should also ensure School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAM) are organized at various levels to discuss the results of the tests with emphasis of performance and remedial actions.